



# Norwich Public Schools

## ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

Food Service Department

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### Governor's Bill No. 5020 sec. 4

Good Evening members of the Education Appropriations Committee. My name is Roberta Jacobs, and I am the Food Service Director at Norwich Public Schools. I am here today to talk with you about funding for the School Nutrition Programs, and to tell you a little about Norwich and our children. In our town, 70% of the students in Norwich Public Schools are low income and receive free or reduced price meals. This is not a rich town. We do our best to feed the children who come to school hungry when there is no food in the home. Monday mornings they can't wait to get in line for breakfast. In addition to breakfast and lunch, we serve snacks for after school programs, and we participate in the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. In the summertime, we serve meals at 30 or more sites around the city in the schools, parks and playgrounds. We also participate in the Farm to School program, helping out our local farmers while we introduce our students to more fresh local produce. Why am I telling you all this? It's not to brag, although I feel we do a wonderful job of serving the families in our town. I want you to understand how important it is that we do not have a reduction in our funding. I feel that it is important to serve the children good quality, low fat, nutritious meals. I also feel that it is important to feed the children fresh fruits and vegetables which cost a little more, and which they don't have access to at home.

I also serve as the Vice President of the School Nutrition Association of CT, and feel that I need to speak on their behalf as well. The financial demands on school food service programs have increased over the years. As the school boards are tightening their budgets, they are passing the costs of labor, insurance, maintenance and equipment that they used to cover on to the food service programs to cover for themselves. As a result, our tight budgets have become even tighter. Even losing just 5 cents on each meal served can add up to thousands and thousands of dollars less that we have to spend on nutritious meals for our children, and this can break our programs. Like everyone else, we feel the pinch. We have been forced to cut labor and benefits of our workers. We baby our equipment to get it to last a few more years. We search for the best prices for the food we serve.

I understand that the State of CT is also feeling the pinch. I know that you are facing tough decisions, and I wish you luck as you go through this budget process. But I am also asking you to help us care for our children. Please do not cut our funding. We are already struggling to get by with the small amount you are now budgeting for us, and we really can't do it with less.

Thank you for allowing me to share to my thoughts with you.